

Colby Coolly Confronts Chile

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Central Intelligence

Agency Director William E. Colby stepped coolly into a public confrontation yesterday over his agency's covert activities in Chile, took the boos and hisses with equanimity, and gave little in return.

Appearing in a crowded Capitol Hill hearing which was heavy in political theater but short in substance, Colby declined to discuss publicly details of the reported \$11 million in secret U.S. activities targeted against the late Chilean President Salvador Allende before and after he came to power.

He did not deny the reports, which stemmed from secret testimony he gave a House subcommittee last April 22. There was only the most oblique hint of confirmation when he deplored the leak of his testimony as raising the "dilemma of how we can provide Congress delicate information without adverse effects."

Colby reiterated his longstanding position that "the CIA had no connection with the military coup [in Chile] in 1973." He acknowledged, however, that "we did look forward to a change in government" in the 1976 elections.

Colby weathered with imperturbability the cross-examination of congressional questioners, the needling and oratory of Pentagon Papers martyr Daniel Ellsberg

and heckling inquiries from the floor.

"How many people have you killed?" someone shouted from the audience. Colby launched into a calm and numbing exposition of the Phoenix program in Vietnam, which he directed and which has become a focus of public criticism of his tenure as head of the U.S. pacification team there between 1968 and 1971.

Commentary

Colby's chief interrogator on the Chile question was Rep. Michael Harrington (D-Mass.) who inadvertently touched off the controversy in a confidential letter to House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman Rep. Thomas Morgan (D-Pa.) detailing Colby's April 22 testimony on secret CIA activities there.

Colby told Harrington that the CIA had briefed its congressional oversight subcommittees on all major covert activities undertaken abroad. He said also that he would discuss details only "before the appropriate subcommittees."

Making the case for respectability of covert operations, Colby cited participation of feminist Gloria Steinheim in CIA subsidized youth festival activities during the late 1960s. He recited a published testimonial by Ms. Steinheim that she and fellow participants were free to say what they pleased during their travels.

The forum before which Colby spoke was a conference on "the Central Intelligence Agency and Covert Action" sponsored by the Center for National Security Studies. Participants included former national security officials, ex-CIA agents, intelligence scholars and journalists.

In his prepared statement, Colby took note of proposals that the CIA abandon its covert action programs carried out by the directorate for clandestine services, colloquially known as the "Department of Dirty Tricks."

"This is a legitimate question," Colby said. "In light of current American policy, as I have indicated, it would not have a major impact on our current activities or the current security of the United States." This was a strong hint that covert operations abroad have been reduced to a negligible level.

Critics

But, the CIA director added, "a sovereign nation must look ahead to changing circumstances. I can envisage situations in which the United States might well need to conduct covert action in the face of some new threat that developed in the world."

But it was the consensus of most of the panelists, as stated yesterday by Herbert Scoville Jr., former CIA deputy director for science and technology, that covert operations "consistently 'interfere with legitimate intelligence collection' by the agency." He urged that the function, if it were necessary at all, should be spun off to a separate agency.

Other participants, Ellsberg and former National Security Council staffer Morton Halperin, objected on grounds that the covert programs abroad institutionalize illegal actions against foreign governments or political movements. Author David Wise also objected that the secret activities also required a policy of "plausible deniability" on the part of U.S. officials when publicly questioned about them.

Colby told Sen. James Abourezk (D-S.D.), chairman of yesterday's session, that he has proscribed the phrase "plausible denial" from use at CIA headquarters.

"I do not feel that I can tell the American people an untruth," said the CIA director, his face composed behind neutral-shaded shell eyeglasses as guffaws echoed through the hearing chamber.

When Abourezk asked Colby about an article appearing in last Sunday edition of The Washington Post alluding to a \$350,000 National Security Council authorization for bribery of the Chilean Congress in 1970, Colby responded:

"Those are details I'm not going to talk about."

Asked whether his agency undertakes action abroad which would be deemed criminal in the United States, Colby said quietly, "Of course. Espionage is a crime in the United States."

Colby was also pressed on whether he could provide assurances that corporations controlled by Vice Presidential nominee Nelson A. Rockefeller and his family would not be used as CIA "covers" in the future. "This would not be a useful subject for me to discuss," he answered.

The major piece of theater was provided by Ellsberg, who announced to Colby that he had just learned from testimony gathered by Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.) that CIA officials had evidence—long before they admitted it—of the burglary of his psychiatrist's office.

"You have much to answer for," Ellsberg said in his peroration. "Not very much to me—very little."

Colby answered with the only touch of heat he brought to the room. He challenged Ellsberg to support his accusation that "I do not support the constitution and do not understand it."

"I understand it," said Colby to Ellsberg, "as well as you do."

As yesterday's session wound to its close a young woman in a red dress leaped to her feet and shouted, "You are not only a liar, you are a Nazi, too." Colby peered back expressionlessly and replied, "I deny that."

Harrington, Michael

Ellsberg, Daniel

ORG Center For Nat Security Studies

Morgan, Thomas

Steinheim, Gloria

Rockefeller, Nelson

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019103 Scoville, Herbert

P. Wise, David

Abourezk, James